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AUTHOR Mau, Wei-Cheng
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ABSTRACT

In this paper, a graduate student from Taiwan completing a counselor education program at the University of Iowa, comments on his counselor training in the United States and explains how that training has prepared him to work within his own culture. Adjustments which must be made in transferring knowledge gained in the American counselor education program to practice in Taiwan are considered, and the usefulness of different counseling techniques and approaches in working with Taiwanese clients is explained. Other areas discussed include the shortage of counselors in Taiwan, the need for more professionally trained counselors, the usefulness of group counseling, and the importance of career development counseling as people in Taiwan have more freedom to choose careers than they had in the past. The need for counselors in Taiwan to gain more professional identity, develop their own counseling programs, educate people about counseling resources, conduct research within their own culture, and develop their own theoretical counseling approaches are examined. In discussing how counselor education programs in the United States might better serve international students, it is suggested that a more flexible practicum requirement that would allow international students to work in their own countries or cultural settings might be useful and that that counseling programs could be modified to become more global, responsive, and receptive to the needs of all people around the world. (NB)

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An International Student's Perspective on Counselor Education

by

Wei-Cheng Mau

Counselor Education

The University of Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa 52242

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An International Student's Perspective on Counselor Education

I would like to give you some introduction to my cultural background before I comment on my counselor training in the United States and how the training has prepared me to work within my own culture.

I was born and grew up in Taiwan, the Republic of China. Most of you have heard of Taiwan from the merchandise that is made in Taiwan, but not many people know about the people or culture of Taiwan.

The Chinese culture is influenced by the philosophy of Confucius and Lao Tze and their followers. The Confucian social order is loosely organized, with the "family" as its unit. The Chinese family unit used to be fairly big, with three or four generations living together. Chinese individualism is tempered with family responsibility. The elders in the family take care of the needs of the family members and they also expect the full respect and obedience from the members. The family, especially the elders, takes care of its members the way a modern state does its citizens. It is their training ground, savings bank, insurance company, legal adviser, counselor, and their public relations agent. An example of this is evident in my family when both my mother and mother-in-law have traveled thousands of miles to the United States to babysit my children, and have been doing this for the past three years.

The people in Taiwan are Chinese and speak several dialects. People with different dialects have their own unique

cultural background. Like America, there are Caucasian, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian they all have their own cultures and dialects. To over-generalize Taiwanese as Chinese or Oriental is misleading.

Although people in Taiwan are very much influenced by traditional Chinese cultural values, they have been facing fast changes in almost every facet of their lives. The society is in the transition from the "old" tradition toward modern society. They are now facing transitional value conflicts. This is primarily because of the impacts of modern technology and western culture. The decrease in the size of the family unit is a consequence of these impacts. Their needs are now less dependent on the family and more on the social systems. They are looking more for their individual rights, fairness, privacy, and are more willing to seek help from outside resources. We need more culturally trained counselors in today's changing society of Taiwan for the increasing number of people needing help.

With this background, we could start to understand how Chinese thinking, feeling and behavior are shaped by their own culture and how their mental health concepts and cultural values are different from Westerners'. I feel this understanding is very important, especially for me, because I can therefore focus on what areas of training I think are important and are useful to my own culture and be able to transfer what I learned in the United States to my own culture. I conducted a research project which compared Chinese and American graduate students'

help-seeking attitudes and behaviors. The findings suggested that Chinese help-seekers seemed to prefer older counselors and to view counseling as a directive, paternalistic, and authoritarian process (Mau & Jepsen, 1988). This is a direct result of our Chinese culture.

I came to the U.S. in 1983. Like other international students, I went through a series of stages of adjustment and readjustment. The language and cultural barriers were the key issues of my learning in the first two years of my counselor training. The counselor training emphasized reading, writing and communication skills. The learning contexts were also often designed specifically for the American culture. I had to expend extra effort and take extra courses in order to keep up with the American students. However, my cultural heritage, hard work and strong belief in education have paid off. I received my Master's degree in 1985. Feeling that I needed more training in research and theoretical understanding, I then continued my study in Counselor Education and am currently a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Iowa.

The Counselor Education program at The University of Iowa is very strong in theory and research. I think I have been well educated in counseling theories and research methodology and am ready to transfer this to my own culture with minor adjustment. I find individual theory such as Rogers' client-centered approach and cognitive theory such as Ellis RET model are more useful than other theories. Rogers' client-centered approach is useful

because it emphasizes trust and genuine relationship. RET model is useful for its directive approach. To be effective in counseling Chinese people, these two approaches seem to be important and work well when person-centered is employed first followed by Ellis directive approach. Perhaps, an integrative, adaptive approach such as proposed by Howard, Nance, and Myers in 1986 would also be more effective in meeting the need of people within the Taiwanese culture who hold different values.

Theory of group dynamics and career development are two areas of training that I find most useful in preparing me to work within my own culture. Group counseling is important because of the shortage of counselors. We need more professionally trained counselors. Group counseling seems to be able to solve the problem of limited counseling resources, at least temporarily. Career development is getting more and more acceptance and popularity. This is because people in Taiwan have more freedom in choosing their careers than they used to have. There are several things that need to be done to create a successful career counseling program: We need to have a national survey of occupational structures and information systems; and we need to develop and research career appraisal instruments that are appropriate for the Chinese culture.

I also learned, not from the curricula but from my personal observation, that systems set up for the counseling profession are very important for the United States and will become important for Taiwan. Counseling in the United States has won

certain territory and professional identity in education and health professions but is still a new concept for many of the Chinese people. We need to gain more professional identity, to develop our own counseling programs, and to educate people about counseling resources. We also need to do research within our own culture and develop our own theoretical counseling approaches. My personal experience as an AACD member and my research training should allow me to make a significant contribution to my own country.

The practicum experiences I had prepared me more for working with multicultural issues rather than working with my own culture. I have completed three semesters of counseling practicum. All of these practicums allowed me to work with various American populations. Although counseling across cultures helped me to be more conscious about my own cultural identity, it did not help me obtain direct experience in counseling people from my own culture. I wonder if it would be possible for a more flexible practicum requirement for international students so that they can do practicums in their own countries or cultural settings, especially for those who wish to return to their home countries.

Overall, I feel I have had solid training and preparation in counselor education. What I learned in the United States should be adaptable to my own culture. However, I believe that there is so much that could be done to modify counseling programs to become more global, responsive and receptive to the needs of all

people around the world. For instance, a cultural awareness course could be built into a counselor education program to train counselors to be more sensitive to the cultural differences and related counseling issues. Regular meetings could be set up for international students to meet with faculty and the department chair so that the needs of foreign students could be recognized. The department of Counselor Education could work closely with Foreign Student Advisors to provide services such as new student orientation, internships and practical training opportunities, and re-entry adjustment workshops. The counseling faculty could also visit foreign students' home countries to get cross-cultural experiences as well as participate at home as host families, and English conversational partners.

In summary, with the recent significant increase in international student enrollment both in counseling and in other fields of study, we must re-evaluate our efforts to integrate new populations into the on-going life of college. It is my belief that counselor education should provide greater support to its international students.

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